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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANTANANARIVO 000487

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SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: TANGLED POLITICS, BUT DIALOGUE  
CONTINUES

REF: A. ANTANANARIVO 484

¶B. ANTANANARIVO 476

Classified By: POLOFF JEFF HULSE FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Madagascar's High Transitional Authority (HAT) launched a round of four-day Regional Meetings ("assises régionales") in all 22 regions on June 30, in an attempt to add grassroots legitimacy to their transition government. These meetings were also "to give the people a voice" as they prepare for a National Conference in mid-July, to consider revising the constitution, and to prepare for the resumption of international mediation efforts under the aegis of SADC in the coming weeks. The Meetings have been boycotted by all three significant opposition movements, as well as the largest civil society coalition, but some opposition leaders leave open the possibility of participating in the National Conference - with conditions. As SADC prepares to resume the mediation effort, political talks continue on the sidelines in Tana; a consensual solution may not be imminent, but skepticism about the resumption of international mediation has spurred the parties to keep talking politics. END SUMMARY.

LITTLE CHANGE SINCE THE SUSPENSION

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¶2. (C) Since the June 16 suspension of UN/AU/SADC/OIF negotiations in Antananarivo, the four participating political movements have made little tangible progress. Didier Ratsiraka, still in France, continues to demand a "cancellation" of his convictions before his representatives will engage in further talks. Albert Zafy (always the least influential and most flexible), continues to focus on national reconciliation and the formation of an inclusive government. The HAT of Andry Rajoelina is plowing ahead on the blueprint it laid out in April (if somewhat belatedly: the Regional Meetings should have been in May, and the National Conference before the June 26 holiday), in an attempt to prove that it can govern on its own and pressure its political rivals, and the international community, into accepting its leadership of the transition. Ravalomanana (still in South Africa) has helpfully declared his support for the upcoming SADC mediation, but has yet to call off his supporters' daily demonstrations or extinguish their hope for his imminent return. When the negotiating team returns, they will likely find that very little has changed outwardly since their departure.

REGIONAL MEETINGS: POLITICAL THEATER IN THE PROVINCES...

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¶3. (C) The current Regional Meetings will run from June 30 to July 3, and are billed as a chance for the Malagasy people to express their views on many of the issues that will guide the transition government, and inform the debate on

constitutional reforms. It has also become a chance to pass the buck on politically sensitive issues. HAT advisor Yvon William Randriazanakolona (aka "Sareraka") recently informed EmbOff that if presidential hopeful Pierrot Rajaonarivelo wanted an amnesty for his 2002 conviction (which currently prevents him from running in an election), he would have to get that on the agenda at the Meeting in his native region of Atsinanana (Tamatave). This contrasts sharply with Rajaonarivelo's recent comments to Ambassador Marquardt, indicating his hope for a "secret amnesty deal" facilitated by Legalist opposition leader Alain Andriamiseza - an admittedly unrealistic scenario. By pushing such issues out to the regions, the HAT will find it easy to simply avoid responding - just as they've done by sending "political prisoners" to a lax form of house arrest to avoid granting pardons, claiming that an amnesty for Ratsiraka can only be decided by an elected legislature -- which doesn't currently exist -- and repeatedly asserting that "only the people can decide" if Rajoelina should run in an eventual presidential election, despite his earlier statement that he will not run.

¶4. (C) The HAT has also devised a survey with 39 questions that they intend to be the focal point of these Meetings, with sections on constitutional reforms, political parties, media, the role of opposition parties and former presidents, and the nature of "national reconciliation". The questionnaire is confusing ("shall we set up a judiciary power, a judiciary committee, or an entity with a jurisdictional role?"), leading ("shall we copy all other countries and hold a President responsible for crimes committed while serving as President?"), and poorly conceived: since most of the recipients will not understand

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most of the questions, they will likely seek instruction from the organizers. Despite a public boycott by the opposition, the HAT will sell these meetings as an attempt to engage in open dialogue with their opponents, and then blame opposition obstructionism for their failure to obtain "consensus". The meetings could usefully serve as regional "party congresses" for the HAT, providing them an opportunity to develop a political platform, but only if they recognize that the elusive "consensual solution" will not be achieved by simply inviting their opponents to talk: their rivals must actually accept the invitation, as well.

...WHILE THE REAL SHOW'S IN TANA

¶5. (C) Away from the spotlight of the Regional Meetings, talks continue among the major political movements in Antananarivo, all of whom are skeptical about the eventual resumption of international mediation. Legalist leader and seasoned political operator Andriamiseza has for weeks been working in the shadows to bring the four movements, plus that of Pierrot Rajoanarivelo, into an accord that leaves much of the HAT intact (including leaving Rajoelina and Monja as President and Prime Minister, respectively). The catch remains his conviction that such talks are best done in secret, and presented as faits accomplis to their leaders once their subordinates have achieved consensus. His confidence in that method is not borne out by the continued failure of delegates to actually speak for their leaders, but recent conversations with advisors in the HAT indicate that they at least may be prepared to strike a deal with the Legalists; this would leave diehard supporters of Ravalomanana, Ratsiraka, and Zafy in a shrinking minority. If he is successful, Andriamiseza intends to make his "committee" public after the Regional Meetings, paving the way for participation in the National Conference.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Political debate in Madagascar is no longer about counter-coups or reinstating Ravalomanana. The major political actors are actively engaged in a web of backroom deals (whether to obtain amnesty, find a power-sharing formula, or achieve the release of high-profile political prisoners), running parallel to their public efforts (such as

the HAT's Regional Meetings, the Legalists' daily demonstrations in Tana, or Ravalomanana's visit to the AU summit in Syrte). These seemingly counterproductive projects will continue, however: the ongoing, peaceful street demonstrations keep the HAT from unilaterally declaring victory in the absence of tangible opposition, and the success (real or imagined) of the Regional Meetings will ensure that the other movements keep searching for a way to remain relevant. As SADC prepares to take over the mediation effort, Madagascar's political movements will continue to seek their own solution in parallel; although a consensual, inclusive transition government may not be easy, all parties appear to accept the need to achieve it through dialogue, with more than a bit of political theater on the side. END

COMMENT.

MARQUARDT